

# Janet's Journal

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September 2021

## Return to Normal?

Dear [FirstName],

The newsletter this month is all about practicality. It's an idea that somehow rings true with the traditional return of the school year and an eye toward cooler autumn days, when one cannot help but feel a sense of peace washing over the world as life gets a bit cooler and calmer.

On the subject of practicality, included in this newsletter are real statistics on what a return to "normal" looks like now that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be mostly in our rearview mirror, as well as one on active listening. As the article says: "If you don't actively listen to other people, you won't gain any wisdom from their insights".

I really hope you enjoy this month's newsletter, preferably in a shady space where you're comfortable sitting down to read on a regular basis. If that spot doesn't readily exist and you're thinking of buy or sell, or considering a more major change like a home transition, do reach out so we can talk about some ideas.

Looking ahead,  
Janet Browning

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Winning As One
- Welcome Home
- Active Listening
- Artificial Intelligence, Real Communication
- Clever Inventions
- What Makes a Leader?
- Home Office Safety
- Getting Back to Normal
- Practical Passion

### Winning As One

A budding anthropologist, who was completing her doctoral thesis while on location in Spain, proposed a game to some children in a small village.

She placed a basket of enticing-looking sweets near a tree early one morning.

That afternoon, after all the children were aware of the basket - and all of them wanted one of the treats - the researcher told them that whoever got to the tree first could have all the goodies in the basket.

She did not lay out any rules or requirements, nor did she encourage the children to pursue the basket with any guidance at all on her part. Seated nearby, she simply held her notebook in her lap and waited, expecting to observe various approaches and plans from the different children, all trying to obtain the basket for themselves.

When she gave the signal to go, all the children gathered together in a huddle and talked in quiet tones with some interjected giggles, then held each other's hands and ran to the tree together and worked as a group to pull down the basket.

As promised, the anthropologist let the children enjoy the whole basket of treats, but simultaneously asked them why they'd decided to run together as a group and split the treats amongst themselves. One tall child looked at her and, with genuine confusion on his face, asked: *"How can any of us be happy by taking something away from another person?"*

*"It is only by winning as one that we all win," the child proclaimed.*

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## September Question

**Q:** Which is the only vowel on a standard keyboard that is not on the top line of letters?

## Aug Question

**Q:** Betty Boop first turned up in an August cartoon in what year?

**A:** 1930

## Welcome Home

Did you know that Ellis Island closed as an immigration facility in 1954 and reopened as a museum in September, 1990? Annie Moore, a 17-year old girl who arrived with her two younger brothers from Ireland, was the first arrival processed through the station in 1892, followed by more than 12 million other immigrants before the station was closed in 1954.

Around 2.3 million people came through the Island just between 1924 and 1954, although the busiest day at the former immigration center was on April 17, 1907 when 11,747 people were processed. Over the years, Bob Hope, Cary Grant, Irving Berlin and Frida Kahlo all passed through the immigration station during its useful years. At its peak, the station had its own power station, hospital, laundry facilities, and cafeteria.

Today, the Family Immigration History Center at Ellis Island is home to a vast archive of approximately 65 million searchable records of immigration documents. People can locate connections to their own ancestry there, as well as add their contributions to an ongoing catalog of family stories.

# Active Listening

One essential skill to master when cultivating relationships is listening. If you don't actively listen to other people, you won't gain any wisdom from their insights. The *Healthline* website shares these tips for active listening:

- **Give people your full attention.** Concentrate on their words to the exclusion of everything else. Don't plan your response while they're still speaking, and don't use a pause to steer the conversation around to another topic.
- **Use positive body language.** Your body communicates just as much as your words do, if not more. Make sure you're fully facing the other person. Relax your body, but lean in slightly to show interest in what they're saying. Nod to show you're listening and that you understand.
- **Don't interrupt.** You may be tempted to jump in with an idea or solution. Restrain the impulse. Instead, wait for the other person to stop talking before asking questions or offering your point of view.

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## Artificial Intelligence, Real Communication

Technology has enabled a paralyzed man to communicate on a computer screen almost as fast as texting on a smartphone, according to the *Science Focus* website.

A Stanford University team used artificial intelligence (AI) software and a brain-computer interface implanted in the brain of a man who had lost movement below his neck after a spinal cord injury. The interface consists of two chips, about the size of a baby aspirin, implanted in the man's motor cortex in the region that controls hand movements. The electrodes in each chip send signals from the neurons to a computer, where the AI software reads the motion of the patient's hands and fingers.

The scientists instructed the man to imagine he was writing with a pen on a sheet of paper. Although more tests of safety, longevity, and effectiveness have to be conducted before the technique can be used more widely, the interface translated the mental visualization of handwriting movements into text, ultimately reaching a writing speed of about 18 words per minute, with 94% accuracy.



# Clever Inventions

According to an anecdote, Thomas Edison had a summer residence he was very proud of. He enjoyed showing visitors around the property and pointing out various inventions. At one point, people had to pass through a heavy turnstile to get back to the house.

One visitor asked Edison why, with all the other clever gadgets around, he had such a heavy turnstile. Edison replied, *“Well, you see, everyone who pushes the turnstile around pumps eight gallons of water into the tank on my roof.”*

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# What Makes a Leader?

Leadership calls for the right perspective on people. The website of the *MIT Sloan School of Management* shares these words of wisdom from top leaders:

- **Carol Cohen, Cognizant:** *“Your long-term success is not just determined by what you achieve alone, but also by how you empower, engage, support, and elevate your colleagues and teams in the ecosystem around you.”*
- **George Westerman, MIT Sloan:** *“The ability to envision and drive change is just as important as the ability to work with technology. If you don’t have both, you can’t succeed in this world.”*
- **Craig Robinson, WeWork:** *“Creating, aligning, and empowering diverse teams is one of the best ways to discover and develop new ideas.”*
- **Hal Gregersen, MIT Sloan:** *“Most leaders excel at thinking, ‘Oh, here are the tasks to be done,’ but they often don’t step back to consider how specific roles are changing and what that means for people experiencing a significant identity shift at work.”*
- **Piyanka Jain, Aryng:** *“If you’re not going to be able to be data-driven and hold your team accountable from the top, it’s not going to flow down. Leadership is the key.”*
- **Doug Ready, MIT Sloan:** *“Go out on the limb, that’s where all the fruit is. Take a few risks— trust that your people will admire you for doing so. Leadership is a privilege. Embrace it as you build a community of leaders in this new economy.”*

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**See Page 7**

# Home Office Safety

Working from home? Home office safety isn't just a matter of not tripping over pets or banging your head against ceiling lamps. Computer security is essential to both your personal information and your employer's proprietary data. *Forbes* recommends these precautions:

- **Install updates promptly.** Software updates usually include antivirus programs and other security protections for fixing flaws and safeguarding data. Don't ignore them when you get a notification on your screen.
- **Keep the VPN on.** If you access your employer's network using a virtual private network (VPN), keep it going. A VPN encrypts information flowing between you and your organization, preventing crooks from stealing sensitive data like confidential financial and customer information.
- **Watch for scams.** Scammers can create an email address that looks like your company's, or some other trusted organization's, to trick you into sharing information or lets them gain access to your organization's network. Don't open emails unless you know who sent them, and never click on a link or attachment that's unfamiliar.
- **Create strong passwords.** Use passwords to protect access to sensitive data. Take the time to devise passwords that can't be easily guessed. Strong passwords should have 10 characters, including numbers, punctuation marks, and random capital letters.

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## Getting Back to Normal

With COVID-19 vaccines now available and society seemingly reopening for business, at least some of us are ready to say that things are going back to normal after the pandemic year.

According to *Gallup*, 66% of adults in the U.S. say their lives have "somewhat" or "completely" returned to normal, while 34% say normal life has yet to come back.

Complicating the return to normalcy is the finding that 52% of respondents say their life is still being disrupted because of the pandemic—14% say "a great deal" and 38% say "a fair amount". That might not change soon, as 39% expect the disruption to continue through the end of the year, and 16% feel the impact will last longer.

# Practical Passion

We're often told to "follow your passion" in choosing a career, but that's not necessarily the best advice. *Forbes* explains why:

- **You can have more than one passion.** Few of us have a single, overriding goal in life—and that wouldn't necessarily be healthy. Think through what interests you, the kinds of tasks and activities you enjoy, and find one that's both motivating and appropriate for a long-term career.
- **Passions change.** What dazzles you as a teenager may not interest you as an adult. As you grow closer to retirement, your goals for life may change. Don't lock yourself into a single path you can't get free of, should the need arise.
- **You may not know what your passion is.** Most of us have many different interests. Not all of them get us excited, though. You may have to spend some time doing jobs you don't enjoy before discovering what you really want to do with your life.
- **Passion doesn't automatically translate to skill.** You can spend years trying to master what you're passionate about, only to find you don't really have the talent to do it professionally. Be realistic about your skills before committing to a lifetime of disappointment.
- **Passion can fade.** Over time, that thing you once loved may turn into just a job; a series of tasks that doesn't bring you any joy. Be sure your passion can sustain you over the long term, or be prepared to take on something more stable even if you're less enthusiastic about it. You can always find fulfillment off the job.
- **Passion may not pay the bills.** It's an unfortunate fact of life that many worthwhile endeavors don't pay very well. Choose something you can do well, even if you don't love it, so you don't have to scramble to make a living forever.



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*"Growth and comfort do not coexist."* ~Ginni Rometty



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# Janet's Journal

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